Convoy Security Operations

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Convoy security operations are major missions during any peace enforcement or humanitarian relief deployment. Although some of the factors that must be considered apply to specific locations, others are universal: Units must organize for tactical security during movement and at halts, and the principal threats to convoys are mines and ambushes.

The following are some basic tactical and organizational principles that the 2d Battalion, 87th Infantry, 10th Mountain Division, developed and used in preparing for deployment to Somalia in early 1993. Other units that are to deploy on similar missions may also find them useful:

Organization for Convoy Security. The preferred unit size for a convoy security operation is an augmented rifle company, and the smallest should be a reinforced platoon.

Convoy security elements that are likely to operate at great distances from the battalion base camp need the equipment to communicate with the camp. On extended convoys, a retransmission element under battalion control may have to be positioned for this purpose, or tactical satellite or other long range communication equipment must be attached.

Each convoy should have an organic indirect fire weapon (60mm or 81mm mortar), an attached TOW section or platoon, a medical vehicle (which may be an ambulance), and a command and control vehicle with an AN/VRC 12 FM radio capability and an OE-254/GRC antenna.

Units in a convoy escort role should take their full complement of automatic weapons with a basic load of ammunition. They should have at least a two-day supply of rations and other classes of supply, with additional supplies loaded for extended missions.

The following are sample components for convoy security:

- A company of three rifle platoons, 60mm mortar section, Dragon section, TOW platoon or section, company fire support officer (FSO), medic vehicle (two medics), and a command and control vehicle.
- A platoon of two Dragon teams, one 60mm mortar squad, TOW section, platoon fire support element, command and control vehicle with FM communications, and medic vehicle.

Units may make minor modifications to this troop list, of course, but the intent is clear: Each convoy must be capable of extended-range fires, both direct and indirect; each element must be able to call for indirect fire and talk on fire support radio nets; and special troops—such as engineers, air defense, and additional medics—must be task organized to convoy security elements as the mission requires.

Vehicle Preparation. All units must take steps to configure their organic and attached vehicles for convoy security operations. In addition to U.S. Army vehicles, the convoy may include a wide variety of relief and local vehicles in various states of repair. The following steps should be taken to prepare both vehicles and personnel:

- Run maintenance checks on all vehicles—fluid levels, brakes, fuel type.
- Configure cargo load for ready access to critical supplies.
- Note type of driver (military, relief worker, or local).
- Sandbag all floors in driver's cab, including under the seats.
- Sandbag all HMMWV (high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicle) or five-ton truck seats and flatbeds.
- Double-sandbag the designated point vehicle.
- Remove all HMMWV doors, and roll or tie up the canvas sides.
- Leave the doors on the TOW HMMWVs, but travel with windows down.
- Remove window glass, which is a secondary missile hazard. (Make certain that all drivers and vehicle commanders have sun, wind, dust goggles.)
- Position troop vehicles among the relief supplies. U.S. Army soldiers who are riding as security on relief cargo vehicles must organize the vehicles to provide maximum cover from fire as well as observation in all directions. Care must be taken to see that soldiers are not accidentally thrown out by a poorly trained and disciplined local driver. The soldiers can use the cover that bags or boxes of relief supplies offer. Bags of rice and flour, especially, have the same bullet-stopping qualities as sandbags. They can be piled in such a manner as to create embrasures along the sides of a vehicle so that the soldiers behind them can face outward. The bags have the added advantage of absorbing mine blasts. The supplies should be piled up to the sides of the vehicle's cargo compartment; positions on vehicles should not be built so high that they are unstable.

• Train soldiers to drive the relief cargo vehicles in case the assigned drivers desert under fire or become casualties.

• No more than one squad (nine men) should be on any one vehicle.

• On vehicles carrying U.S. soldiers, a U.S. Army vehicle commander must be in the cab beside the driver.

• Soldiers should face outward at all times. Automatic weapons should be placed over cabs in air-guard fashion, and M60 machineguns should be on sandbag-stabilized tripods, if possible.

• As many vehicles as possible should have some type of radio communications—AN/PRC 126, AN/PRC 77, AN/VRC 12.

• Each convoy should have at least two global positioning systems (GPSs), if they are available.

Movement Considerations. During movement, the following should be in place:

• A signal for herringbone movement (horn blast, pyrotechnics, etc).

• Each vehicle should drive in the tracks of the vehicle ahead to reduce the risk of hitting a mine. The point vehicle crewmen must wear additional body armor and sit on flak jackets.

• Speed should be no more than 15 to 20 kilometers per hour; vehicles must be able to maintain proper interval and dispersion.

• Personnel inside the vehicles must face outward, covering a full 360 degrees with designated sectors of observation. Vehicle crews must always be in visual contact with the vehicles to their front and rear.

• The unit must have clearly established signals for "enemy in sight," "require assistance," "close interval" and the like, and these signals must be rehearsed before the convoy movement.

• The vehicle interval should be at least 50 meters.

• The unit must have a hasty perimeter standing operating procedure (SOP) for short halts.

Tactical Considerations. Convoys should generally consist of point, advance guard, main body, and rear or flank guard elements. Convoys may be protected by a unit as large as a company or as small as a platoon, with the strength and composition of these elements dictated by the strength of the convoy escort.

• The point element should consist of a single vehicle carrying a fire team. The vehicle must be heavily sandbagged, and all occupants must wear extra body armor and sit on flak jackets. The vehicle should carry a mine detector, and the fire team should be trained in its use. The point element carefully observes the road for evidence of recent digging or other mine indicators. The point element halts at all danger areas and allows the convoy commander to move forward to be apprised of the situation. The point element maintains a distance of 50 meters to one kilometer from the next element.

• The advance guard normally consists of the platoon from which the point element is taken. It may have a 60mm mortar squad or a Dragon squad, or both. The advance guard normally travels 500 meters to one kilometer from the point element and the same distance from the main body. Normally, only a company-sized escort forms an advance guard (a platoon just putting out a point element). The advance guard's function is to provide immediate reaction to any contact the point element may make, or to set up an overwatch when the convoy encounters a danger area.

• The main body consists of most of the relief vehicles, the convoy command and control, medical, and fire support assets, and at least one platoon of combat power. Troops ride on the relief vehicles themselves and fortify the vehicles. The main body always maintains visual or radio contact with the advance guard and with the flank and rear security elements.

• The rear or flank security element, which can be up to a platoon in size, follows the convoy at a distance of 500 meters to one kilometer. In addition to protecting the convoy from rear attacks, this element must be prepared to come up alongside the convoy to conduct a hasty flank attack on ambushing forces. Because of their cross-country mobility, the flank security elements should consist of either TOW or infantry squad HMMWVs, and the vehicles must have radio capability. The flank security elements engage any hostile forces at the greatest possible distance and maintain contact so the convoy commander can develop the situation (Figures 1 and 2).

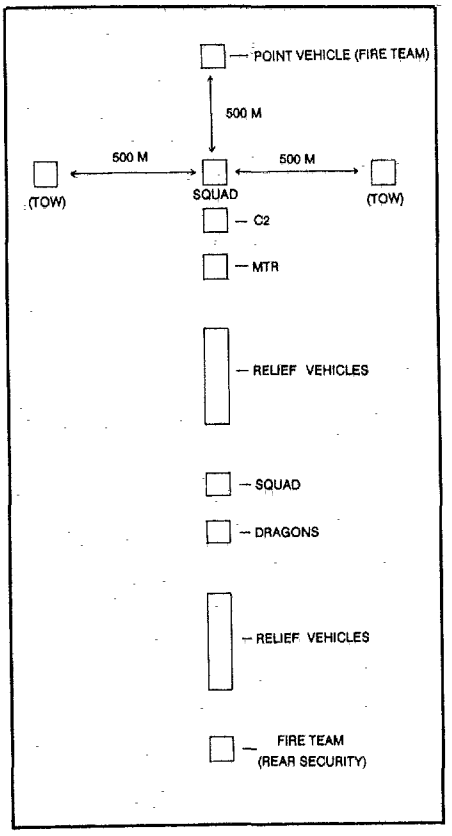

Figure 1

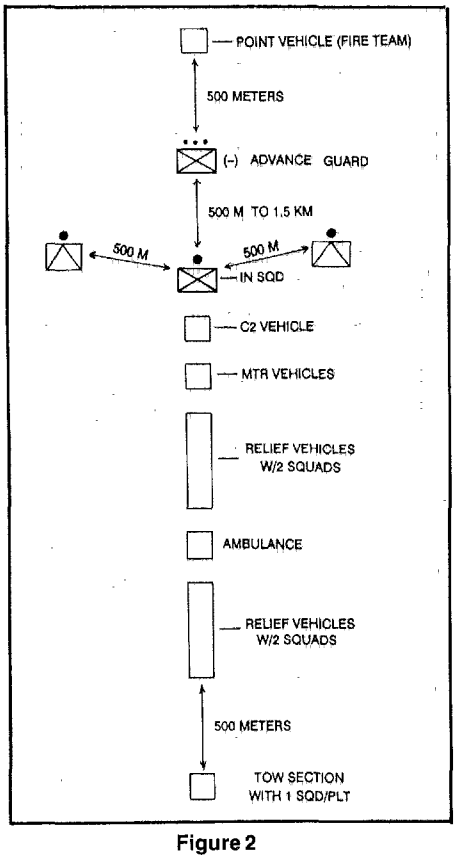

Figure 2

Convoys normally move in a traveling overwatch formation with an advance guard at least 500 meters. The point vehicle should be an additional 500 meters from the advance guard. Most of the convoy protection forces ride on the convoy vehicles. In addition, the rear guard travels 500 meters behind the main body. If terrain and vehicle limitations allow it, flank elements should be 300 to 500 meters from either side of the front of the main body. Mortars should generally travel with the main body, and TOWs with the flank or rear elements.

Some additional tactical considerations for convoy movement are:

- Most of the vehicles being escorted are limited to hard-surface roads or flat hard-packed ground, which makes convoy routes predictable. The convoy FSO should pre-plan targets on all likely ambush sites—such choke points as bridge sites, mountain or hill pass areas, reverse slopes of hills, bends in the road, and dry stream beds.
- Units should have reaction-to-contact drills for contact to the front, flanks, or rear. These drills should involve basically two courses of action: First, herringbone, rapid-dismount, and establishment of a base of fire to defeat the ambush; and second, continued movement through the kill zone. Of the two, the first is probably most common. The best deterrent to harassment or ambushes is a quick and decisive response with organic and indirect fires.
- The convoy commander should have FSO switching priority targets as the convoy advances. In this manner, supporting field artillery is always more quickly available.
- The convoy commander and FSO should know the extent and limitations of friendly field artillery firing fans and what part of the convoy routes are outside these fans.
- The convoy commander and FSO should have the call-signs and frequencies of attack helicopters and U.S. Air Force elements.
- Convoys should halt at all danger areas (defiles, bridges), establish overwatch, and clear the danger area with a dismounted element.
- Convoys should have pre-designated halt sites with clear fields of fire and preplanned artillery targets.
- A battalion should have a reaction force of at least company strength with an 81mm mortar section ready to act as a reaction force either by truck or by helicopter.
- If possible, the battalion should have an aircraft ready to move toward a convoy's expected location in case the battalion loses communications, either to reestablish communications or ascertain the convoy's status.

Command and Control Considerations. The following command and control considerations are important:

- Routes, checkpoints, and phase lines are the preferred control measures.
- The progress of the convoy—as it reaches and passes each checkpoint—must be reported to the battalion TOC. The TOC should monitor its progress in accordance with road movement tables, and any deviation from the schedule must be reported to the TOC. A failure to report at two checkpoints or a loss of communications for a specified period causes the battalion to launch an aircraft to investigate the convoy's status.
- A battalion posts the march tables and timelines for each convoy and calls in the convoy's progress to brigade.
- Each convoy should have at least two copies of the march tables and carry them on two separate vehicles.
- Each convoy should have at least three maps, and all vehicles occupied by U.S. soldiers should have strip maps showing all the graphic control measures.
- Each convoy should carry panel markers, strobe lights, and signal mirrors.
- All convoy command and control personnel should practice panel signals in case radio communications fail or the equipment is destroyed.
- Convoy commanders should report on road and refugee conditions and the presence of any armed parties.
- A convoy can be diverted only by U.S. Army personnel who have the proper authorization. Commanders must emphasize to convoy leaders that they are not at the beck and call of other members of the relief effort who may ask them for supplies.

Logistical Considerations.

- Each convoy should have some kind of recovery team—either U.S. Army, relief agency, or local—and the team should have at least a mechanic and a tow bar. The team should be armed and have the same body protection as other soldiers.
- Convoys should have designated points on the route of march for emergency aerial resupply and for medical evacuation as well.
- Convoys should check the fuel and maintenance status of each vehicle at each stop.
- Convoys must not stop to bury the remains of war, disease, or famine victims. Instead, they must report the location of the remains with an eight-digit grid location; local details will then be recruited to bury them.
- Convoy leaders may recruit labor to unload vehicles with food as payment (one MRE, for example). Every effort must be made to use local personnel to unload vehicles so that as many soldiers as possible can remain on security. At no time should more than half the convoy personnel be involved in unloading. heavy weapons must be manned at all times.
- Soldiers must not be allowed to give food or water from their own rations to local citizens. Large gatherings of refugees clamoring for food provide perfect cover for a terrorist with a grenade. Discouraging people by not giving handouts will reduce this threat.

In summary, convoys are a large part of peace enforcement and humanitarian relief operations. There will always be unusual circumstances in which a commander must come up with an imaginative solution and accept risk. But the overall principles of organization for combat, security, and command and control are principles he must not ignore.

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